



County of San Diego, Planning & Development Services

THINGS TO CHECK BEFORE STARTING A PROJECT, OR BUYING PROPERTY

ZONING DIVISION

In California there are a number of laws and regulations that help guide land development to ensure community character, sustainability, and life safety aspects in new construction, are all considered as part of a project. Before starting a project or buying a piece of land, it's important to do research and ask the right questions ahead of time. This document has been prepared to help guide you in your research. As each parcel and project is unique, there is no single list of all items to research, however this is a starting point for the basic questions you should ask before starting.

- **Is the parcel a legal lot?** – An assessor's parcel may or may not constitute a legally separate lot (a "legal lot") authorized for development. Before a building permit on a parcel can be issued, verification of a legal lot must be obtained. Please contact the Zoning Division at (858) 565-5981 (Mon. - Fri. from 8:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.) for a legal lot determination.
- **How is the property zoned?** – Zoning regulations govern what can and can't be done with property. Planning & Development Services (PDS) has a number of online self-service tools available along with a description of the zoning information that can be quickly and easily accessed by using our online tool to find out what you can do with the property; <http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/pds/reports.html>
- **Is the property governed by any discretionary permits?** – Any project that was approved through a discretionary permit is required to be 100% consistent with that particular permit. If your project will require approval of, or changes to, a discretionary permit, you must file a separate planning application to do so. Discretionary permit approvals must be granted, before you are allowed to apply for a building permit. Please contact the Zoning Division at (858) 565-5981 to find out if the property is subject to a discretionary permit.
- **Preliminary parcel information:** – You can also use our online Initial Study Research Report to obtain preliminary parcel development & environmental information for properties located within unincorporated San Diego County. The report also includes detailed property maps, General Plan and Zoning Information. Please see link; <https://gis-public.co.san-diego.ca.us/ISRP/home>.
- **Are all of the buildings/additions permitted?** – Unpermitted structures/additions aren't easy to uncover, but one good way to find them is by looking at the County's appraisal records. If you purchase property with unpermitted construction, you assume any and all liability related to it. If your property contains unpermitted structures, you will be responsible to take whatever steps are necessary to get it permitted or to remove the unpermitted additions/structures. Buildings that are constructed, wired or plumbed improperly can lead to dangerous conditions that would affect more people than just the owner or occupants of a property. Please contact the Building Division at (858) 565-5920; or review the County's assessor records.
- **Building Permits ... when are they required?** – Generally, you need to obtain a building permit from the County whenever you construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move, remove, improve, convert, or demolish a building or other structure. A building could be anything from a tool shed, barn, or garage, to a house and it may include building, grading, plumbing, mechanical and electrical permits. The County processes the various permit types required as one total package. If you have a question about permit requirements for your project, please call the Building Division at (858) 565-5920 or review Form [PDS-110](#) for a list of exceptions.
- **How to get a building permit?** – The application packet is available at the Building Division counter at 5510 Overland Ave, San Diego, CA 92123 as well as online in the Forms link for our website at <http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/pds/docs/pds441a.pdf>

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<http://www.sdcountry.ca.gov/pds>



County of San Diego, PDS, Zoning Division THINGS TO CHECK BEFORE STARTING A PROJECT, OR BUYING PROPERTY

Continued

- **How much does a building permit cost?** – It varies. Many of the fees collected in conjunction with building permits issued by the County of San Diego, are not under the authority of the Building Division specifically. The following is a listing of agencies fees which may apply to a proposed project. For a more detailed building permit fee estimate, please see link below;
<http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/pds/bldgforms.html#fees>
 - Fees of the Fire Department;
 - Fees of the School District
 - Fees of the Water Department/District
 - Fees of the Sewer Department/District
 - DEH fees for septic review/approval
 - Transportation Impact Fee (TIF), etc.
 - Park fees
- **Does the property have any constraints?** – Please review your title report or grant deed for any easements, floodways, open space easements, or other constraints, such as covenants that may impact the property you are interested in buying. Some easements are shown on filed maps and may also be described as part of the legal description of a grant deed or in a separate recorded document. Please contact the Land Development Division at (858) 694-2055 to find out if the property has covenants, or if the property is within the Floodplain/floodway area.
- **Have all covenants been satisfied?** – Certain subdivisions may have covenants in place that lay down specific rules for the use of the property in question. Often, those covenants must be completed prior to development. They must often be satisfied before a building permit can be issued or before the lot can be developed. Please contact the Land Development Division at (858) 694-2055 to find out if all covenants have been satisfied.
- **Is my building permit subject to Centerline review?** – For a determination, you must initiate the centerline review process (generally for commercial & multi-family permits) with the Land Development Division as early as possible in order to coordinate departmental requirements and processing time. Requirements may include granting of right-of-way, irrevocable offers of dedication, relinquishment of access rights, traffic striping, installation of curb, gutter, & sidewalk, road widening, street lights, drainage facilities, and undergrounding of utility distribution facilities. Please see link:
http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/dpw/LAND_DEVELOPMENT_DIVISION/landpdf/plotplan.pdf
- **Hire the right people.** – We really can't stress this enough, especially if you have no previous experience with developing land. This is a very important decision you will have to make, because you could be working so closely with your realtor, architect, engineers, and contractor throughout the purchasing, approval and permitting process. While the County does not provide recommendations, we encourage you to research prospective consultants before working with them.

Our goal is to help you navigate the land development process. We encourage you to call or visit us before you submit your building permit application. We will answer your questions and help you understand how your proposed project may fit within the County's development guidelines and regulations. You may also learn that your project as proposed does not fit within the regulations, and may need to be revised. Also, projects that require Stormwater PDP's, or L-Grading permits could add significant costs and time to a project.

You may also want to discuss your project with the Public Works Department, the Fire Department, or the Health Department to determine if there will be any special requirements. Staff may suggest ideas to make the building permit process easier for you. Asking us questions at the outset may save you processing time. We're glad to take the time to help you – it's part of why we are here.

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